THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) and (d) Some of the zoos in India have inadequate veterinary infrastructure due to not having qualified Veterinary Officers on such posts lying vacant. Indian Veterinary Research Institute is taking steps to start a nine months Course for veterinarian on veterinary aspects of wildlife management. Central Zoo Authority is evaluating various zoos and the country in submitting recommendations for the improvement of the zoos which also cover the aspect of veterinary care.

Decline in forest cover area

416. SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that according to reliable data, India is losing its forest area at the rate of 3.7 million acres a year;

(b) if so, the approximate acres of forest cover lost during the five years;

(c) whether Government have made any efforts to check this rate of fall in forest area; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the progress achieved?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) India was loosing forest cover at an average rate of 47,500 ha. annually in the early eighties, but, since the past few years the forest cover is on the increase. By the year 1993 (which is the latest assessment) there was a total net increase of 58,200 ha. in the forest cover, as compared to the position in 1987.

This was possible due to:

— Change in National Forest Policy

— Rigorous implementation of Forest (Conservation) Act and Wildlife (Protection) Act.

— Large scale afforestation under 20 Point Programme.

US Commerce Secretary's Press Conference

417. SHRI K. R. MALKANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the US Commerce Secretary Mr. Ron Brown held his Press Conference in New Delhi in the open in front of Rashtrapati Bhawan;

(b) whether such thing has ever happended before;

(c) what was the propriety of holding the Press Conference at such a site;

(d) on what consideration Government permitted it; and

(e) wheher Government will take care not to permit such Nataki-Karan in future?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (e) US Commerce Secretary Mr. Ron Brown held an impromptu meeting with some members of the Press in front of Rashtrapati Bhawan on 17 January, 1995. No formal permission was requested for holding the informal and impromptu question and answer session.

Visa Fee raised by Saudi Arabia

418. SHRI K. R. MALKANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Saudi Arabia has raised the visa fee for Indians nationals from 50 Saudi Riyals (Rs. 450) to 1,000 Riyals (Rs. 9,500);

(b) whether it has raised the visa fee for the nationals of other countries also and if so, what extent;

(c) whether Government have registered a protest or propose to raise visa fee

for Saudi nationals visiting India, to the same level; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) It is a fact that the Government of Saudi Arabia has recently increased the visa fee from SR 50/- to SR 1000/- in respect of foreign workers for their employment with the private companies and establishments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

(b) The revised fee as stated above is uniformly applicable to workers from all the foreign countries including India.

(c) and (d) The matter was taken up with the concerned authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who have clarified that the revised visa fee is to be borne by the Saudi employers and not by the expatriate workers. It is understood that the modalities in this regard are being worked out by the concerned Saudi authorities.

Nuclear threat by Pakistan

419. SHRI S. AUSTIN:
SHRI V. RAJAN CHELLAPPA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether an influential U.S. Congressman had warned the Clinton Administration recently that the nuclear-armed Pakistan would pose a grave thereat, not only to India but to the U.S. as well; and

(b) if so, the reaction of Government and the steps proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir, Republic Congressman Bill McCollum in a statement featured in the Congressional Record dated September 12th 1994, drew attention to the report entiled "Pakistan's Nuclear Brinkmanship" of the Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, of the House Republican Research Committee, dated August 24, 1994, which states that "Fully aware that no single country could confront the US on its own, Islamabad stressed the growing significance of nuclear and military cooperation with other radical states as of crucial importance." The report concludes that "Benazir Bhutto, for reasons geopolitical and domestic, is personally leading Pakistan into becoming a key and action component in a major global axis aimed at confronting the US..... It is under Mr. Bhutto that Pakistan has .....raised the profile of its confrontation with the US and India."

(b) Government have consistently held the view for long that Pakistan is pursuing a weapons-oriented nuclear programme. It has been pointed out that Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme had evolved surreptitiously from its infancy. Government have called on the international community to act concertedly to enoure that Pakistan behaves as a responsible member in the comity of nations, and that Pakistan should be forthwith compelled to abandon its nuclear weapons programme.

Visit of the President of South Africa

420. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during the recent visit of South African President, Mr. Nelson Mandela, the question of containing international terrorism in the context of Pakistan's active support to terrorists in Kashmir was discussed with him.

(b) if so, in what precise context and terms and whether he made a distinction between liberation struggle and terrorism; and

(c) what other issues were discussed with him?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS